

Durham County Council Social Services Department



D & FP

TECHNICAL REPORT

55720

a DEVELOPMENT and FORWARD PLANNING DIVISION production
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Assessment Centres in Durham

- a study

NCJRS

MAR 27 1979

ACQUISITIONS

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

This management summary forms a preface to the report which is specifically designed for those who wish to assimilate the conclusions of the study whilst omitting detailed argument. This summary is a précis of the report designed for management.

Summary

The average age of the 98 children in the sample was 14.3 years. The majority of the children (91.8%) were legitimate and 88.8% came from either a Comprehensive or Secondary Modern School. The majority of the children had appeared in court for criminal offences. Differences between the 3 assessment centres on the above factors were slight. Park View and Brandon tended to have younger children than Seaham with the children at Park View having fewer court appearances than Seaham or Brandon.

The family background of the child is an important factor in determining why the child has been brought into care. Only 56% of the children in the sample came from families in which both the biological father and mother were present and married to each other. The average ages of the male and female parent were 44 and 41 years respectively. This means that the child was born to parents of between 27 and 30 years on average. This does not support the hypothesis that these children came into care after being born to 'young and inexperienced' families.

There was a very high level of unemployment (54.1%) amongst the male parents of the children. The majority of children came from larger than average families housed in rented local authority accommodation.

The majority of children came from families which might be described as disadvantaged from an economic point of view and atypical in family structure.

Certainly within this sample communication between the family and the child was extremely weak or non-existent for between a half and three quarters of the children. 75% of the children did not receive visits, letters or any other form of communication from the parent. Between 40% and 50% of the children did not visit or write letters to their

families.

All admissions to Park View and Brandon were for assessment whilst only 39% of admissions to Seaham were for assessment with 61% of admissions being for holding or emergency reasons. 57% of referrals came from social agencies with 39.8% coming from the courts and 3.1% from child guidance agencies.

26.5% of the total sample had been in an assessment centre before. Nearly all of those who had been in an assessment centre before (23 out of 26) were part of the sample from Seaham. Over half of the 98 children in the total sample had been previously placed in a residential establishment.

The average length of stay of children at the 3 centres varied considerably from 38 days at Seaham through 86 days at Park View and 126 days at Brandon.

Of the 62 children who received a case conference, 43 were placed in the ideal type of establishment specified by the case conference.

Each of the 3 assessment centres admits a different type of child and this is crucial in determining the final pattern of assessment and placement. The results of the analyses suggest that the distribution of children to final placement is random. The study has been able to identify distinct groups of children the actual placements of these similar children appear to be spread over the broad spectrum of child-care facilities.

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INTRODUCTION

The first four sections of this report form a description of 98 children which were admitted to the three assessment centres in County Durham. The sample was taken from each assessment centre on a 'period of time' basis (i.e. every child admitted to the assessment centres during a certain period was included in the sample). The differential response from each assessment centre reflects the difference in through-put or length of stay of children in each centre. This differential through-put in turn reflects the difference in the type of child entering each centre.

Section 5 is not a description but is an analysis of the sample of children using 'Cluster Analysis' to determine similar groups of children both within and across the 3 assessment centres. This analysis draws conclusions on the homogeneity of placement in relation to groups of children.

It is necessary in order to place this study in context to look very briefly at the 3 assessment centres considered in this report.

The first centre, 'Park View', is a local centre catering for up to 21 children of either sex. The centre exists for and does appear to achieve the process of assessment in relation to the children admitted. All children (with some minor exceptions) receive a case conference and if an immediate ideal placement is not available there is some provision for a form of interim support prior to placement.

The second centre, 'Brandon', is again a local centre catering for up to 30 children of either sex. Again with some minor exceptions all children receive a case conference and earlier problems of finding placements for the children are being solved. This has meant a continuing decrease in the average length of stay of children following the case conference over the past 12 months.

Seaham in contrast to Park View and Brandon is an inter-authority resource catering for up to 20 girls. A case conference is the exception rather than the rule though the type of child admitted to

Seaham often makes the case conference an irrelevancy. The throughput of children at Seaham is considerably higher than that of the other two centres and hence the average stay of the children admitted considerably lower. There appears to be few problems of placement from Seaham. The pressure on places at Seaham is considerable and this reflects the general shortage of places for girls in assessment centres in the Northern Region as a whole.⁽¹⁾ The emphasis at Seaham is upon solving the problems of children whose problems are as much a result of the 'current method of assessment and placement within the child-care system' as they are personal or family problems.

These comments and conclusions are further discussed and analysed in the following sections of this report.

(1) A report by M. S. Hoghghi, February, 1976, made the following comment: 'Assessment Centres can only admit about 50% of the girls for whom places are requested.'

1.0.0 THE CHILDREN'S BACKGROUND

1.1.0 Age, Sex and Legal Status

Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample by sex and assessment centre. Sixty-eight percent of the sample were female whilst 32% of the sample were male. This is primarily due to the fact that Seaham is purely for girls and does not imply that more girls attend assessment centres than boys.

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE BY SEX
AND ASSESSMENT CENTRE

Centre \ Gender	Male	Female	Total
Park View (%)	12 (50)	12 (50)	24 (100)
Brandon (%)	19 (67.9)	9 (32.1)	28 (100)
Seaham (%)	0 (-)	46 (100)	46 (100)
Total (%)	31 (31.6)	67 (68.4)	98 (100)

Table 2 shows the age distribution of the sample. The overall average age of the 98 children was 14.3 years. The lowest average age occurred at Park View with 13.3 years through 13.5 years at Brandon and 15.3 years at Seaham. Only 3.1% of the sample were aged below 10 years, 40.8% were aged between 10 and 14 and 56.1% were aged between 15 and 17 years.

TABLE 2
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE

Centre	Age in years			Total	Average Age
	5-9	10-14	15-17		
Park View (%)	1 (4.2)	15 (62.5)	8 (33.3)	24 (100)	13.3
Brandon (%)	2 (7.2)	13 (46.4)	13 (46.4)	28 (100)	13.5
Seaham (%)	0 (-)	12 (26.1)	34 (73.9)	46 (100)	15.3
Total (%)	3 (3.1)	40 (40.8)	55 (56.1)	98 (100)	14.3

As can be seen from Table 3 the vast majority of the children in the sample were legitimate (91.8%). Only 4.1% of the children were known to be illegitimate.

TABLE 3
THE CHILDS LEGAL STATUS

Centre	Legitimate	Illegitimate	Not Known	Total
Brandon (%)	25 (89.3)	3 (10.7)	0 (-)	28 (100)
Seaham (%)	42 (91.3)	0 (-)	4 (8.7)	46 (100)
Total (%)	90 (91.8)	4 (4.1)	4 (4.1)	98 (100)

1.2.0 School Type and Court Appearances

Table 4 shows the type of school attended by the child immediately prior to admission to the assessment centre. 88.8% of the sample came from either a Secondary Modern or Comprehensive School. 7.1% came from Junior Schools. Only 4.1% came from remedial or special schools for the

educationally subnormal.

TABLE 4
DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE BY
SCHOOL TYPE IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO ENTRY

Centre \ School	Junior	Secondary Modern	Compre- hensive	Other	Total
Park View (%)	4 (16.7)	6 (25.0)	14 (58.3)	0 (-)	24 (100)
Brandon (%)	3 (10.7)	15 (53.6)	7 (25.0)	3 (10.7)	28 (100)
Seaham (%)	0 (-)	27 (58.7)	18 (39.1)	1 (2.2)	46 (100)
Total (%)	7 (7.1)	48 (49.0)	39 (39.8)	4 (4.1)	98 (100)

Table 5 shows the number of children with court appearances for criminal or other offences. 43.9% of the sample had appeared in court for minor criminal offences. 14.3% of the sample had appeared in court for major criminal offences. The pattern of criminality across the assessment centres is reasonably similar. Seaham had the highest percentage of children with previous court appearances at 67.4%, however, Brandon with 54.3% and Park View with 58.3% were not greatly dissimilar. Table 6 shows the average age at the first court appearance. The overall average age for the 63 children with court appearances was 13.7 years. This average age varied from 12.8 years at Park View through 13.6 years at Brandon to 14.1 years at Seaham.

Court appearances are an important factor in explaining why over half of the children in the sample were in fact in an assessment centre. Conversely, however, 35.7% of the sample were in the assessment centre for reasons other than criminal offences.

TABLE 5
COURT APPEARANCES

<u>Centre</u> \ <u>Court Cases</u>	None	Minor Criminal	Major Criminal	Other	Total
Park View (%)	10 (41.7)	8 (33.3)	2 (8.3)	4 (16.7)	24 (100)
Brandon (%)	10 (35.7)	7 (25.0)	11 (39.3)	0 (-)	28 (100)
Seaham (%)	15 (32.6)	28 (60.9)	1 (2.2)	2 (4.3)	46 (100)
Total (%)	35 (35.7)	43 (43.9)	14 (14.3)	6 (6.1)	98 (100)

TABLE 6
AGE AT FIRST COURT APPEARANCE

<u>Centre</u> \ <u>Age in years</u>	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	Total	Average Age
Park View (%)	1 (7.2)	9 (64.2)	2 (14.3)	2 (14.3)	14 (100)	12.8
Brandon (%)	2 (11.1)	5 (27.8)	10 (55.6)	1 (5.5)	18 (100)	13.6
Seaham (%)	4 (12.9)	4 (12.9)	18 (58.1)	5 (16.1)	31 (100)	14.1
Total (%)	7 (11.1)	18 (28.6)	30 (47.6)	8 (12.7)	63 (100)	13.7

1.3.0 Conclusions

The average age of the 98 children in the sample was 14.3 years. The majority of the children (91.8%) were legitimate and 88.8% came from either a Comprehensive or Secondary Modern School. The majority of the children had appeared in court for criminal offences. Differences between the 3 assessment centres on the above factors were slight. Park View and Brandon tended to have younger children than Seaham with the children at Park View having fewer court appearances than Seaham or Brandon.

2.0.0 THE FAMILY

2.1.0 Status, Marital Status and Age of the Parents

Tables 7 and 8 show the status of the child's male and female guardians with whom the child was living on entry to the assessment centre.

Table 7 shows that 66.3% of the sample were living with the biological father before entry into care. 12.3% of the children had a step or foster father. 15.3% of the children came from a household in which there was no male guardian. Table 8 shows that 78.5% of the sample were living with the biological mother on entry into care. A further 6.2% had a step or foster mother. 11.2% of the children were living in a household with no female guardian.

TABLE 7
STATUS OF THE MALE PARENT OR GUARDIAN WITH
WHOM THE CHILD WAS LIVING ON ENTRY TO THE CENTRE

Centre	Biological Father	Step Father	Foster Father	No Father	Other	Total
Park View (%)	18 (75.0)	0 (-)	1 (4.2)	3 (12.5)	2 (8.3)	24 (100)
Brandon (%)	17 (60.7)	5 (17.9)	0 (-)	3 (10.7)	3 (10.7)	28 (100)
Seaham (%)	30 (65.2)	4 (8.7)	2 (4.3)	9 (19.6)	1 (2.2)	46 (100)
Total (%)	65 (66.3)	9 (9.2)	3 (3.1)	15 (15.3)	6 (6.1)	98 (100)

TABLE 8
STATUS OF THE FEMALE PARENT OR GUARDIAN WITH
WHOM THE CHILD WAS LIVING ON ENTRY TO THE CENTRE

Centre	Biological Mother	Step Mother	Foster Mother	No Mother	Other	Total
Park View (%)	16 (66.6)	1 (4.2)	1 (4.2)	6 (25.0)	0 (-)	24 (100)
Brandon (%)	23 (82.2)	2 (7.1)	0 (-)	2 (7.1)	1 (3.6)	28 (100)
Seaham (%)	38 (82.7)	0 (-)	2 (4.3)	3 (6.5)	3 (6.5)	46 (100)
Total (%)	77 (78.5)	3 (3.1)	3 (3.1)	11 (11.2)	4 (4.1)	98 (100)

Tables 9 and 10 show the marital status of the child's male and female guardians. 56.2% of the children in the sample came from a home which contained both a mother and a father who were married to each other. 29.1% came from a family in which the male parent was either divorced/separated or co-habiting. 32.6% came from a family in which the female parent was either divorced/separated or co-habiting. In conclusion only just above one half (56.2%) of the children in the sample came from a 'normal' or 'average' home.⁽¹⁾

TABLE 9
MARITAL STATUS OF MALE GUARDIAN OR PARENT

Centre	Married *	Divorced/ Separated	Co-habiting	No Father	Total
Park View (%)	10 (41.7)	10 (41.7)	1 (4.1)	3 (12.5)	24 (100)
Brandon (%)	20 (71.4)	3 (10.7)	2 (7.2)	3 (10.7)	28 (100)
Seaham (%)	25 (54.3)	9 (19.6)	3 (6.5)	9 (19.6)	46 (100)
Total (%)	55 (56.2)	22 (22.4)	6 (6.7)	15 (15.3)	98 (100)

* Married to the child's mother and both living at home.

TABLE 10
MARITAL STATUS OF FEMALE GUARDIAN OR PARENT

Centre	Married *	Divorced Separated Widowed	Co- habiting	No Mother	Total
Park View (%)	10 (41.7)	8 (33.3)	0 (-)	6 (25.0)	24 (100)
Brandon (%)	20 (71.4)	6 (21.4)	0 (-)	2 (7.2)	28 (100)
Seaham (%)	25 (54.3)	12 (26.1)	6 (13.0)	3 (6.6)	46 (100)
Total (%)	55 (56.2)	26 (26.5)	6 (6.1)	11 (11.2)	98 (100)

* Married to child's father and both living at home.

Tables 11 and 12 show the ages of the male and female parents respectively. The average age of the male parent was 44 years. Given the average age of children in the centre of 14 years the figure of 44 was higher than expected. The hypothesis that children in assessment centres come from 'young' marriages is not supported by the data collected by this study.

The average age of the female parent was 41 years again suggesting that the children in the sample were born to women aged on average 27 years.

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- (1) 'Normal' in this context refers to the 'statistical norm' of the total population. The presence of both biological parents does not imply anything concerning the parents ability to love or care for the child.

TABLE 11
AGE OF MALE PARENT

Centre \ Age in years	Not Known	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Total
Park View (%)	5 (20.8)	0 (-)	7 (29.2)	9 (37.5)	3 (12.5)	24 (100)
Brandon (%)	7 (25.0)	1 (3.6)	10 (35.7)	7 (25.0)	3 (10.7)	28 (100)
Seaham (%)	9 (19.6)	0 (-)	10 (21.7)	19 (41.3)	8 (17.4)	46 (100)
Total (%)	21 (21.4)	1 (1.0)	27 (21.6)	35 (35.7)	14 (14.3)	98 (100)

Overall average age of male parent/guardian = 43.8 years.

TABLE 12
AGE OF FEMALE PARENT

Centre \ Age in years	Not Known	31-40	41-50	51-60	Total
Park View (%)	3 (12.5)	13 (54.2)	6 (25.0)	2 (8.3)	24 (100)
Brandon (%)	3 (10.7)	17 (60.7)	5 (17.9)	3 (10.7)	28 (100)
Seaham (%)	7 (15.2)	18 (39.1)	16 (34.8)	5 (10.9)	46 (100)
Total (%)	13 (13.3)	48 (49.0)	27 (27.6)	10 (10.1)	98

Overall average age of female parent/guardian = 41.0 years.

2.2.0 Unemployment and House Tenure

Table 13 shows the incidence of unemployment amongst the parents of the 98 children in the sample. 54.1% of the male parents were unemployed. 33.7% were employed with 12.2% not known. This level of unemployment is extremely high and although it may not be causally related to

children in care it clearly is a factor which can only exacerbate the unusual nature of the child's home-life. Further to this level of male unemployment 67.3% of the female parents were also unemployed.

TABLE 13
UNEMPLOYMENT AMONGST THE PARENTS

Centre \ Employment	Male Parent			Female Parent		
	Employed	Un-Employed	Not Known	Employed	Un-Employed	Not Known
Park View (%)	8 (33.3)	15 (62.5)	1 (4.2)	3 (12.5)	21 (87.5)	0 (-)
Brandon (%)	12 (42.9)	9 (32.1)	7 (25.0)	10 (35.7)	15 (53.6)	3 (10.7)
Seaham (%)	13 (28.3)	29 (63.0)	4 (8.7)	14 (30.4)	30 (65.2)	2 (4.3)
Total (%)	33 (33.7)	53 (54.1)	12 (12.2)	27 (27.6)	66 (67.3)	5 (5.1)

Table 14 shows the type of house occupied by the child's parents. 82.7% of the children in the sample came from rented local authority housing. 7.1% of the sample came from rented private accommodation and 5.1% from owner occupied accommodation.

TABLE 14
THE PARENTS HOUSE TENURE

Centre \ House Tenure	Rented Local Authority	Rented Private	Owner Occupied	Other	Not Known
Park View (%)	23 (95.8)	1 (4.2)	0 (-)	0 (-)	0 (-)
Brandon (%)	21 (75.0)	1 (3.6)	3 (10.7)	2 (7.1)	1 (3.6)
Seaham (%)	37 (80.5)	5 (10.9)	2 (4.3)	0 (-)	2 (4.3)
Total (%)	81 (82.7)	7 (7.1)	5 (5.1)	2 (2.0)	3 (3.1)

2.3.0 Family Size

Table 15 shows the total number of children in the household for the 98 children. These figures include the respondent. The average number of children in the family is 5.4. This is well above the national average of 2.4 children per household (1971 Census). 64.3% of the children came from families with 5 or more children in them. Approximately 80% of the children in the sample came from families which had a greater number of children in them than the national average.

TABLE 15
NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN THE HOUSEHOLD
(INCLUDES RESPONDENT)

Centre \ No. of Children	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9+	Total
Park View (%)	5 (20.8)	7 (29.2)	8 (33.3)	4 (16.7)	0 (-)	24 (100)
Brandon (%)	3 (10.7)	9 (32.2)	11 (39.3)	2 (7.1)	3 (10.7)	28 (100)
Seaham (%)	1 (2.2)	10 (21.7)	19 (41.3)	9 (19.6)	7 (15.2)	46 (100)
Total (%)	9 (9.2)	26 (26.5)	38 (38.8)	15 (15.3)	10 (10.2)	98 (100)

Average number of children in the family = 5.4.

2.4.0 Conclusions

The family background of the child is an important factor in determining why the child has been brought into care. Only 56% of the children in the sample came from families in which both the biological father and mother were present and married to each other. The average ages of the male and female parent were 44 and 41 years respectively. This means that the child was born to parents of between 27 and 30 years on average. This does not support the hypothesis that these children came into care after being born to 'young and inexperienced' families.

There was a very high level of unemployment (54.1%) amongst the male parents of the children. The majority of children came from larger than average families housed in rented local authority accommodation.

The majority of children came from families which might be described as disadvantaged from an economic point of view and atypical in family structure.

3.0.0 FAMILY-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

3.1.0 Communication between the Family and the Child in the Assessment Centre

3.1.1 Visits from the Parents

Table 16 shows the frequency of visits made by the male and female parents to the child in the assessment centre. 80% of the children in the sample did not receive visits from the male parents. 10% of the children received visits on a regular basis and a further 10% received visits on a seldom basis. 68% of the sample did not receive visits from the female parent whilst 20% received visits on a regular basis and 11% received visits seldomly.

TABLE 16
VISITS TO THE CHILD IN THE CENTRE

Centre \ Visits to Child	Male Parent			Female Parent		
	Often/Regular	Seldom	None Recorded	Often/Regular	Seldom	None Recorded
Park View (%)	3 (12.5)	2 (8.3)	19 (79.2)	10 (41.7)	0 (-)	14 (58.3)
Brandon (%)	4 (14.3)	4 (14.3)	20 (71.4)	2 (7.1)	4 (14.3)	22 (78.6)
Seaham (%)	3 (6.5)	4 (8.7)	39 (84.8)	8 (17.4)	7 (15.2)	31 (67.4)
Total (%)	10 (10.2)	10 (10.2)	78 (79.6)	20 (20.4)	11 (11.2)	67 (68.4)

3.1.2 Letters from the Parents

Table 17 shows the frequency of letters written by the male and female parents to the child in the assessment centre. 74.5% of the children received no letters from the male parent and 63.3% of the children received no letters from the female parent. The female parent, as with visits to the child, tended to write more often than the male parent.

TABLE 17
LETTERS TO THE CHILD IN THE CENTRE

Centre	Letters to Child	Male Parent			Female Parent		
		Often/Regular	Seldom	None Recorded	Often/Regular	Seldom	None Recorded
Park View (%)		5 (20.8)	3 (12.5)	16 (66.7)	11 (45.8)	1 (4.2)	12 (50.0)
Brandon (%)		2 (7.1)	1 (3.6)	25 (89.3)	2 (7.1)	1 (3.6)	25 (89.3)
Seaham (%)		7 (15.2)	7 (15.2)	32 (69.6)	11 (23.9)	10 (21.7)	25 (54.4)
Total (%)		14 (14.3)	11 (11.2)	73 (74.5)	24 (24.5)	12 (12.2)	62 (63.3)

3.1.3 Other forms of Communication by the Parents

Table 18 shows the incidence of other forms of communication by the parents with the child in the assessment centre. As with letters and visits communication is the exception rather than the rule. 76% of children did not receive communication in a form other than a visit or letter from the male parent. 65% of the children did not receive any other form of communication from the female parent.

TABLE 18
OTHER COMMUNICATION WITH THE CHILD IN THE CENTRE

Centre	Communi- cation	Male Parent			Female Parent		
		Often/ Regular	Seldom	None Recorded	Often/ Regular	Seldom	None Recorded
Park View (%)		6 (25.0)	0 (-)	18 (75.0)	11 (45.8)	1 (4.2)	12 (50.0)
Brandon (%)		2 (7.1)	2 (7.1)	24 (85.8)	2 (7.1)	1 (3.6)	25 (89.3)
Seaham (%)		6 (13.0)	6 (13.0)	34 (74.0)	13 (28.3)	5 (10.9)	28 (60.8)
Total (%)		14 (14.3)	8 (8.2)	76 (77.5)	26 (26.5)	7 (7.1)	65 (66.4)

3.2.0 Visits and Letters from the Child in the Assessment Centre to the Family

Table 19 shows the frequency of letters and visits from the child to the family.

44% of the children visited their families on a regular basis. A further 18% of the children visited their family but only seldomly. 38% of the children did not visit their family.

36% of the children regularly wrote letters to their family whilst a further 19% wrote letters but only seldomly. 45% of the children did not write letters to their family.

TABLE 19
LETTERS AND VISITS BY THE CHILD TO THE FAMILY

Centre	Communi- cation	Letters to Family			Visits to Family		
		Often/ Regular	Seldom	None Recorded	Often/ Regular	Seldom	None Recorded
Park View (%)		15 (62.5)	3 (12.5)	6 (25.0)	19 (79.2)	0 (-)	5 (20.8)
Brandon (%)		4 (14.3)	2 (7.1)	22 (78.6)	15 (53.6)	4 (14.3)	9 (32.1)
Seaham (%)		16 (34.8)	14 (30.4)	16 (34.8)	9 (19.6)	14 (30.4)	23 (50.0)
Total (%)		35 (35.7)	19 (19.4)	44 (44.9)	43 (43.9)	18 (18.4)	37 (37.7)

Conclusions

Certainly within this sample communication between the family and the child was extremely weak or non-existent for between a half and three quarters of the children. 75% of the children did not receive visits, letters or any other form of communication from the parent. Between 40% and 50% of the children did not visit or write letters to their families.

4.0.0 THE CHILD IN THE ASSESSMENT CENTRE

4.1.0 Reason for Admission and Source of Referral

Table 20 shows the reason for admission for the 98 children in the sample. All admissions to Park View and Brandon were for assessment. Only 39% of the admissions to Seaham were for assessment with 52% being for holding and 9% for emergency reasons. This marked dissimilarity in reason for admission determines the context in which the functioning of the three centres must be viewed.

TABLE 20
REASON FOR ADMISSION

Centre \ Reason	Assessment	Holding	Emergency	Total
Park View (%)	24 (100)	0 (-)	0 (-)	24 (100)
Brandon (%)	28 (100)	0 (-)	0 (-)	28 (100)
Seaham (%)	18 (39.1)	24 (52.2)	4 (8.7)	46 (100)
Total (%)	70 (71.4)	24 (24.5)	4 (4.1)	98 (100)

Table 21 shows the source of referral for the 98 children. At Park View 40% of the children were referred by a social agency, 30% by the courts for offences and a further 30% by the courts but for non-criminal reasons.

At Brandon 32% of the children were referred by a social agency, 46% by the courts for offences, 11% by the courts for other than criminal reasons and 11% by child guidance agencies. Seaham does not fit the above pattern. 80% of children were referred by social agencies with 15% being referred by the courts for offences and 4% by the courts for non-offences.

This pattern confirms a point which will be further discussed later. Section 1 showed that 67% of the sample of children from Seaham had appeared in court. Only 20% of referrals of the sample of children came directly from the courts. This means that Seaham is not receiving the child at its initial entry into care but rather at a later stage at which earlier placements have broken down.

TABLE 21
SOURCE OF REFERRAL

Centre \ Source	Social Agency	Courts-Offender	Courts-Non-Offender	Child Guidance
Park View (%)	10 (41.6)	7 (29.2)	7 (29.2)	0 (-)
Brandon (%)	9 (32.2)	13 (46.4)	3 (10.7)	3 (10.7)
Seaham (%)	37 (80.4)	7 (15.2)	2 (4.4)	0 (-)
Total (%)	56 (57.1)	27 (27.6)	12 (12.2)	3 (3.1)

4.2.0 Children Absconding and Previous Placements

Table 22 shows the number of times each child has absconded from the assessment centre. Only 2 children at Park View and 2 at Brandon absconded. 13 children at Seaham absconded at some point during their stay.

TABLE 22
NUMBER OF TIMES ABSCONDING FROM THE CENTRE

Absconded (Times)	0	1	2	3	4	5+
Centre						
Park View	22	0	1	1	0	0
Brandon	26	1	0	0	0	1
Seaham	33	6	5	0	2	0
Total	81	7	6	1	2	1

Table 23 shows the number of children previously in an assessment centre. The results shown in this table have important implications. The difference between the 3 assessment centres is marked. At Park View only 2 children out of 24 (8.2%) had previously been in an assessment centre. At Brandon only 1 child out of 28 (3.6%) had been in an assessment centre.

Approximately half of the children at Seaham are on a second lap of the child-care/assessment circuit.

TABLE 23
NUMBER OF CHILDREN PREVIOUSLY IN AN ASSESSMENT CENTRE

Centre	None	Seaham	Brandon	Park View	Other	Total
Park View (%)	22 (91.8)	1 (4.1)	0 (-)	1 (4.1)	0 (-)	24 (100)
Brandon (%)	27 (96.4)	0 (-)	0 (-)	0 (-)	1 (3.6)	28 (100)
Seaham (%)	23 (50.0)	9 (19.6)	1 (2.2)	0 (-)	13 (28.2)	46 (100)
Total (%)	72 (73.5)	10 (10.2)	1 (1.0)	1 (1.0)	14 (14.3)	98 (100)

Table 24 shows the number of children from the sample who had previously been placed within the child-care system. At Park View out of a sample of 24 children 9 (38%) had previously been placed. At Brandon out of a sample of 28 children 4 (15%) had previously been placed. At Seaham out of a sample of 46 children 37 (80%) had previously been placed.

Out of the total sample of 98 children just over half had previously been placed in care. Many of these children had multiple previous placements (the most recent placement only being shown in Table 24) prior to entry to the assessment centre.

TABLE 24
PREVIOUS PLACEMENTS IN RESIDENTIAL CARE

Centre Placement	Park View	Brandon	Seaham	Total
Family Group Home (%)	1 (4.2)	2 (7.1)	12 (26.1)	15 (15.3)
Community Home (%)	2 (8.4)	0 (-)	7 (15.2)	9 (9.1)
Voluntary Home (%)	1 (4.2)	0 (-)	1 (2.2)	2 (2.0)
Foster Home (%)	2 (8.4)	0 (-)	0 (-)	2 (2.0)
E.S.N. School (%)	1 (4.2)	0 (-)	1 (2.2)	2 (2.0)
General Hospital (%)	0 (-)	0 (-)	2 (4.3)	2 (2.0)
Psychiatric Hospital (%)	0 (-)	0 (-)	3 (6.5)	3 (3.1)
Other Placement (%)	2 (8.4)	2 (7.1)	11 (23.9)	15 (15.3)
None (%)	15 (62.2)	24 (85.8)	9 (19.6)	48 (49.2)
Total (%)	24 (100)	28 (100)	46 (100)	98 (100)

4.3.0 The Number of Days to the First Case Conference and the Length of Stay in the Assessment Centre

Table 25 shows the number of days to the first case conference for the 98 children by assessment centre. A striking difference between the 3 assessment centres is that whilst Brandon and Park View tended to hold a case conference for all admissions at Seaham only 14 out of 46 (30.4%) received a case conference. It must be borne in mind, however, that only 39% of the sample from Seaham were admitted for assessment purposes whilst all of the children admitted for Park View and Brandon were admitted for assessment.

The average number of days to the first case conference varied quite widely between centres. At Park View the average number of days to the conference was 72 days whilst at Brandon it was 57 days and at Seaham 46 days.

TABLE 25
NUMBER OF DAYS TO THE FIRST CASE CONFERENCE

Centre	Days					No Conference	Total
	0-30	31-60	61-90	91-125			
Park View (%)	0 (-)	5 (20.8)	13 (54.2)	5 (20.8)	1 (4.2)	24 (100)	
Brandon (%)	1 (3.6)	16 (57.1)	8 (28.6)	0 (-)	3 (10.7)	28 (100)	
Seaham (%)	5 (10.9)	6 (13.0)	2 (4.4)	1 (2.2)	32 (69.5)	46 (100)	
Total (%)	6 (6.1)	27 (27.6)	23 (23.5)	6 (6.1)	36 (36.7)	98 (100)	

Average number of days to the first case conference:

Park View = 72.1 days
 Brandon = 57.4 days
 Seaham = 45.7 days

Table 26 shows the total number of days spent in the assessment centre for each child. No child at Park View or Seaham spent more than 160 days in the assessment centre. At Brandon one child stayed between 161 and 200 days and 6 children stayed over 200 days.

The average length of stay at Park View was 86 days which means that on average the child was placed 14 days after the case conference. The average length of stay at Brandon was 126 days which means that on average the child was placed 69 days after the case conference. The average length of stay at Seaham was 38 days. This figure includes 32 children who received no case conference and stayed less than 40 days.

TABLE 26
NUMBER OF DAYS SPENT IN THE ASSESSMENT CENTRE

Centre \ Days	0-40	41-80	81-120	121-160	161-200	200+
Park View	1	10	9	4	0	0
Brandon	2	8	9	2	1	6
Seaham	32	8	4	2	0	0
Total	35	26	22	8	1	6

Average length of stay in days by assessment centre:

Park View = 86 days
 Brandon = 126 days
 Seaham = 38 days

4.4.0 Ideal and Actual Placement

Table 27 shows the 'ideal' placements suggested by the case conference for those children who received a case conference. Park View and Brandon are similar in the proportion of children they suggest for each type of placement. Seaham has a far higher proportion whose ideal placement is 'home on trial' though the size of the sample (14) is too small

to draw any concrete comparisons.

TABLE 27
IDEAL PLACEMENT RECOMMENDED BY THE CASE CONFERENCE

Centre Placement	Park View	Brandon	Seaham
None	0 (-)	1 (4.0%)	2 (14.3%)
Family Group Home	7 (30.4%)	8 (32.0%)	3 (21.5%)
Community Home	8 (34.8%)	8 (32.0%)	1 (7.1%)
Foster Home	0 (-)	2 (8.0%)	0 (-)
Working Hostel	0 (-)	1 (4.0%)	1 (7.1%)
Home on Trial	6 (26.1%)	5 (20.0%)	7 (50.0%)
Voluntary Establishment	2 (8.7%)	0 (-)	0 (-)
Total	23 (100.0%)	25 (100.0%)	14 (100.0%)

Table 28 shows the actual placement following discharge for the sample of 98 children. The pattern of placement is broadly similar across each of the centres. All three centres sent approximately one-third of their admissions home on trial. Seaham made more use of working hostels than the other two centres. Family group homes were used more by Park View and Brandon than Seaham. Placement in C.H.E's. was equally utilised by all three centres with a range of placement from 12% to 17%. 21.7% of the children from Seaham absconded and were not returned though there is some evidence to suggest that this figure is unusually high. Of the 62 children receiving a case conference 43 were placed in the same type of establishment as their ideal placement. 19 children were placed in an alternative type of establishment.

TABLE 28
ACTUAL PLACEMENT FOLLOWING DISCHARGE

Centre Placement	Park View	Brandon	Seaham
Other	4 (16.7%)	2 (7.1%)	1 (2.2%)
Family Group Home	7 (29.2%)	11 (39.3%)	5 (10.9%)
Community Home (C.H.E.)	3 (12.5%)	5 (17.9%)	8 (17.4%)
Foster Home	2 (8.3%)	1 (3.6%)	0 (-)
Working Hostel	0 (-)	0 (-)	6 (13.0%)
Home on Trial	8 (33.3%)	9 (32.1%)	16 (34.8%)
Absonded not returned	0 (-)	0 (-)	10 (21.7%)
Total	24 (100.0%)	28 (100.0%)	46 (100.0%)

4.5.0 Conclusions

All admissions to Park View and Brandon were for assessment whilst only 39% of admissions to Seaham were for assessment with 61% of admissions being for holding or emergency reasons. 57% of referrals came from social agencies with 39.8% coming from the courts and 3.1% from child guidance agencies.

26.5% of the total sample had been in an assessment centre before. Nearly all of those who had been in an assessment centre before (23 out of 26) were part of the sample from Seaham. Over half of the 98 children in the total sample had been previously placed in a residential establishment.

The average length of stay of children at the 3 centres varied considerably from 38 days at Seaham through 86 days at Park View and 126 days at Brandon.

Of the 62 children who received a case conference, 43 were placed in the ideal type of establishment specified by the case conference.

5.0.0 A COMPARISON OF CLUSTER GROUPS AND PATTERNS OF PLACEMENT

5.1.0 Introduction

The process of assessment has two key elements. Firstly assessment must allow the needs of the child to be recognised and within the context of residential care be understood. Secondly the process of assessment should ensure that the child is placed in an establishment which is capable of meeting the needs of the child. A corollary of this second element is that if suitable resources are not available then the pressure for and development of suitable resources should be the concern of assessment personnel.

The theory upon which this following section is based is that the 98 children in the sample can be grouped into clusters of similar children. In determining a coefficient of similarity reference was given to 50 variables (many discussed in the preceding four sections) covering the child's and the family's backgrounds and the findings of the case conference. Theoretically if the process of assessment is working then similar children should be placed in establishments providing similar patterns of care.

The method of clustering used to identify similar groups of children was Ward's hierarchic fusion. In simple terms this considers all groups of children until it finds groups such that the number of in-group dissimilarities is minimised.

5.2.0 Cluster Results on the Whole Sample

Table 29 shows the 6 cluster groups derived by grouping the whole sample split down by assessment centre. The results suggest that quite different groups of children are entering each assessment centre. With the exception of group 1 the other 5 cluster groups are strongly linked to an individual

assessment centre. (The probability of this pattern of grouping vis-a-vis each assessment centre happening by chance is less than 1 in 10 million).

Whilst further analysis of these groups is required to fully identify the significant variables in each cluster the dominant factors for each group are as follows:

Group 1

This is the average group with no significant deviations of any factor from the norm.

Group 2

- (i) This group is of younger children with an average age of 11 years.
- (ii) There is a higher incidence of court appearances by the parents. Six of the eight parents have appeared in court for criminal offences.
- (iii) A high level of unemployment amongst the parents.
- (iv) No previous placements in care.

Group 3

- (i) A lack of case conferences.
- (ii) A high number of previous placements.

Group 4

- (i) High number of criminal offences by the children. 84.2% had committed major or minor criminal offences.
- (ii) Low level of unemployment amongst parents.
- (iii) Very few previous placements.

Group 5

- (i) Higher than average criminality and older children.

Group 6

- (i) Short stay in care with no previous placements.
- (ii) Non-offenders.

In summary the analysis points to the following differences between the type of child taken into each assessment centre:

- (a) Park View; the children are younger than the average for the 3 centres with a lower number of court appearances and very few previous placements in care.
- (b) Brandon; the children tend to have a higher than average number of court appearances for criminal offences with a lower than average number of previous placements.
- (c) Seaham; the children tend to be older than the average and to have had a significantly higher number of previous placements in care.

TABLE 29

DISTRIBUTION OF ELEMENTS WITHIN CLUSTER GROUPS BY ASSESSMENT CENTRE

Cluster \ Centre	Park View	Brandon	Seaham	Total
Group 1	19	-	10	29
Group 2	4	-	-	4
Group 3	1	-	30	31
Group 4	-	18	1	19
Group 5	-	1	5	6
Group 6	-	9	-	9
Total	24	28	46	98

Table 30 shows the pattern of placement within each cluster group. One would expect each group to exhibit placements to similar establishments. Table 30 shows a diversity of placement within each group rather than a commonality.

TABLE 30
DISTRIBUTION OF ELEMENTS WITHIN EACH CLUSTER GROUP BY PLACEMENT

Cluster Group Placement	1	2	3	4	5	6
Home on Trial	11 (37.9%)	1 (25.0%)	12 (38.7%)	4 (21.1%)	1 (16.7%)	4 (44.4%)
C.H.E.	4 (13.8%)	1 (25.0%)	6 (19.4%)	5 (26.3%)	-	-
Family Group Home	11 (37.9%)	-	1 (3.2%)	8 (42.0%)	-	3 (33.3%)
Absconded	-	-	7 (22.6%)	-	3 (50.0%)	-
Working Hostel	-	-	4 (12.9%)	1 (5.3%)	1 (16.7%)	-
Foster Home	-	2 (50.0%)	-	1 (5.3%)	-	-
Other	3 (10.4%)	-	1 (3.2%)	-	1 (16.7%)	2 (22.3%)
Total	29 (100.0%)	4 (100.0%)	31 (100.0%)	19 (100.0%)	6 (100.0%)	9 (100.0%)

5.3.0 Cluster Results on Individual Centres

Tables 31 to 33 show the distribution of children by cluster group and placement for the 3 assessment centres. Again for each centre the diversity of placement of children supposedly with similar circumstances is shown. If the process of assessment is putting similar children into similar placements then this analysis has failed to show this. If one were to allocate the children randomly to placements, for each centre, the result would be similar to the pattern resulting from the analysis, as shown in Tables 30 to 33.

TABLE 31
PARK VIEW
DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN BY CLUSTER GROUP AND PLACEMENT

Cluster Group Placement	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Home on Trial	6 (66.7%)	1 (50.0%)	1 (11.1%)	-	-	8 (33.3%)
C.H.E.	-	-	2 (22.2%)	-	1 (50.0%)	3 (12.5%)
Family Group Home	2 (22.2%)	-	5 (55.6%)	-	-	7 (29.2%)
Foster Home	-	-	-	2 (100.0%)	-	2 (8.3%)
Other	1 (11.1%)	1 (50.0%)	1 (11.1%)	-	1 (50.0%)	4 (16.7%)
Total	9 (100.0%)	2 (100.0%)	9 (100.0%)	2 (100.0%)	2 (100.0%)	24 (100.0%)

TABLE 32
BRANDON
DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN BY CLUSTER GROUP AND PLACEMENT

Cluster Group Placement	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Home on Trial	1 (20.0%)	1 (50.0%)	4 (26.7%)	2 (66.7%)	1 (33.3%)	9 (32.1%)
C.H.E.	1 (20.0%)	-	4 (26.7%)	-	-	5 (17.9%)
Family Group Home	3 (60.0%)	-	6 (40.0%)	1 (33.3%)	1 (33.3%)	11 (39.3%)
Foster Home	-	-	1 (6.6%)	-	-	1 (3.6%)
Other	-	1 (50.0%)	-	-	1 (33.3%)	2 (7.1%)
Total	5 (100.0%)	2 (100.0%)	15 (100.0%)	3 (100.0%)	3 (100.0%)	28 (100.0%)

TABLE 33

SEAHAM

DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN WITHIN EACH CLUSTER GROUP BY PLACEMENT

Cluster Group \ Placement	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Home on Trial	7 (33.3%)	4 (36.4%)	2 (40.0%)	2 (50.0%)	1 (20.0%)	16 (34.8%)
C.H.E.	4 (19.0%)	2 (18.2%)	-	2 (50.0%)	-	8 (17.4%)
Family Group Home	-	4 (36.4%)	1 (20.0%)	-	-	5 (10.9%)
Absconded	5 (23.8%)	-	2 (40.0%)	-	3 (60.0%)	10 (21.8%)
Working Hostel	4 (19.0%)	1 (9.0%)	-	-	1 (20.0%)	6 (13.0%)
Other	1 (4.9%)	-	-	-	-	1 (2.1%)
Total	21 (100.0%)	11 (100.0%)	5 (100.0%)	4 (100.0%)	5 (100.0%)	46 (100.0%)

6.0.0 CONCLUSIONS

Each of the 3 assessment centres admits a different type of child and this is crucial in determining the final pattern of assessment and placement. The results of the analyses suggest that the distribution of children to final placement is either random or based upon factors which have not been considered by this study. Whilst the study has been able to identify distinct groups of children the actual placements of these similar children appear to be spread over the broad spectrum of child-care facilities.

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ASSESSMENT

CENTRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX A

A. INFORMATION ON CHILD (RING RELEVANT NUMBER)

NOTES

NAME

1. SEX

- 0 Male
- 1 Female

2. LEGITIMACY

- 0 Legitimate
- 1 Illegitimate
- 2 Not Known

3. DATE OF BIRTH

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Day Month Year

4. AGE

--	--

Yrs. Mths.

5. ADOPTED/FOSTERED

- 0 Adopted
- 1 Fostered
- 2 Neither
- 3 Not Known

6. SCHOOL TYPE

- 0 Infant
- 1 Junior
- 2 Modern
- 3 Comprehensive
- 4 Grammar
- 5 Private
- 6 E.S.N.
- 7 Maladjusted
- 8 Secondary
- 9 Other

NOTES

7. COURT APPEARANCES

- 0 Minor Criminal
- 1 Major Criminal
- 2 Other
- 3 Not Known
- 4 None

8. AGE AT FIRST COURT APPEARANCE

--	--

Yrs. Mths.

B. INFORMATION ON FAMILY CHILD LIVING WITH AT TIME OF ENTRY

NOTES

9. PARENTS OR GUARDIANS

<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>	
0	0	Biological
1	1	Step
2	2	Foster
3	3	Other
4	4	Single

10. MARITAL STATE OF PARENTS OR GUARDIANS

<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>	
0	0	Married Each Other
1	1	Married
2	2	Divorced
3	3	Separated
4	4	Cohabiting
5	5	Widowed
6	6	Single
7	7	Other
8	8	Not Known

11. AGE OF PARENTS OR GUARDIANS

MALE Years
FEMALE Years

12. COURT APPEARANCES OF PARENTS OR GUARDIANS

<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>	
0	0	Major Criminal
1	1	Minor Criminal
2	2	Other
3	3	Not Known
4	4	None

13. PARENTS OR GUARDIANS OCCUPATION

MALE

FEMALE

14. PARENTS OR GUARDIANS VISITS TO CHILD
WHILST IN CENTRE

<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>	
0	0	None
1	1	Regular
2	2	Often
3	3	Seldom

15. PARENTS OR GUARDIANS LETTERS TO CHILD
WHILST IN CENTRE

<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>	
0	0	None
1	1	Regular
2	2	Often
3	3	Seldom

16. OTHER FORMS OF COMMUNICATION WITH CHILD
BY PARENTS OR GUARDIANS

<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>	
0	0	None
1	1	Regular
2	2	Often
3	3	Seldom

17. LETTERS FROM CHILD TO EITHER PARENTS
OR GUARDIANS

0	None
1	Regular
2	Often
3	Seldom

18. VISITS BY CHILD TO EITHER PARENTS OR
GUARDIANS

0	None
1	Regular
2	Often
3	Seldom

19. OTHER FORMS OF COMMUNICATION BY CHILD
TO EITHER PARENTS OR GUARDIANS

0	None
1	Regular
2	Often
3	Seldom

NOTES

20. NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD

Siblings

Fostered/Step/Other

21. POSITION

Childs position in group

Childs position amongst
siblings

22. HOUSE TENURE

- 0 Rented Local Authority
- 1 Rented Private
- 2 Tied
- 3 Owner Occupied
- 4 Other
- 5 Not Known

C. INFORMATION ON CHILD IN ASSESSMENT CENTRE

NOTES

23. DATE OF ADMISSION

Day	Month	Year			

24. REASON FOR ADMISSION

- 0 *Assessment*
- 1 *Holding*
- 2 *Emergency*
- 3 *Other*

25. NUMBER OF TIMES ABSCONDING FROM THE CENTRE

--

26. ATTITUDE TOWARDS OTHER CHILDREN

Tick appropriate box.

	0	1	2	3
<i>Peer Group</i>				
<i>Siblings</i>				
<i>Older Children</i>				
<i>Younger Children</i>				
<i>Opposite Sex</i>				

- 0 = *Accepted*
- 1 = *Rejected*
- 2 = *Self Isolation*
- 3 = *Tolerated*

27. SOURCE OF REFERRAL

- 0 = *Offender; Courts*
- 1 = *Non-Offender; Courts*
- 2 = *Child Guidance*
- 3 = *Other Social Agencies*

NOTES

28. CASE CONFERENCES

Date of First Case
Conference

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Number of Days since
Admission

--	--	--	--	--	--

Please note the dates of any further
conferences or reviews below.

29. TESTS IN ASSESSMENT CENTRE

Please list below any tests given to the child in the centre.

30. PREVIOUS ASSESSMENTS

0	None
1	Aycliffe
2	Seaham
3	Brandon
4	Darlington
5	Other

31. PREVIOUS PLACEMENTS

0	None
1	Family Group Home
2	Community Home
3	Voluntary Home
4	Foster
5	Special School E.S.N.
6	Special School Maladjusted
7	Hospital General
8	Psychiatric
9	Other
10	Not Known

(More than one may be ringed).

RECOMMENDATIONS OF FIRST CASE CONFERENCE32. GROUP SIZE

0	Less than 5
1	5 - 10
2	Others

33. CONTROL

0	Relaxed
1	Rigid
2	Structured
3	Other

34. ADULT RELATIONSHIP

0	Male
1	Female
2	Both
3	Not Important

35. EDUCATIONAL

0	Remedial
1	Normal
2	Special Needs

NOTES

36. GROUP TYPE

- 0 Peer Group
- 1 Mixed Ages
- 2 Mixed Sexes
- 3 Older Than
- 4 Younger Than

37. RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

- 0 Yes
- 1 No

38. RECOMMENDED PLACEMENT

- 0 None
- 1 Family Group Home
- 2 Community Home
- 3 Foster Home
- 4 Working Hostel
- 5 Home on Trial
- 6 Special School E.S.N.
- 7 Special School Maladjusted
- 8 Hospital General
- 9 Hospital Psychiatric
- 10 Voluntary Establishment
- 11 Holding Unit
- 12 Another Assessment Centre
- 13 Other

39. DATE OF DISCHARGE

Day	Month	Year

40. TIME SPENT IN ASSESSMENT CENTRE

	Days
--	------

41. TOTAL NUMBER OF VISITS BY SOCIAL WORKERS

--

		NOTES
42.	<u>ACTUAL PLACEMENT</u>	
0	None	
1	Family Group Home	
2	Community Home	
3	Foster Home	
4	Working Hostel	
5	Home on Trial	
6	Special School E.S.N.	
7	Special School Maladjusted	
8	Hospital General	
9	Hospital Psychiatric	
10	Voluntary Establishment	
11	Holding Unit	
12	Another Assessment Centre	
13	Returned Home due to no suitable placement	
14	Other	

END